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Joined Hands, Joined Archives: Collaborating to Build a Future for Catholic Religious Archives

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Joined Hands, Joined Archives

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In the heart of the mountain. Miners work the Holden Mine, circa 1940, when the remote Holden Village was a company town. Now a global destination retreat inaccessible by road, Holden Village offers a wide range of educational and recreational programming. Turn to page 6 to read about its unique archives run by volunteers. *Courtesy of Bill Phillips.*

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JOINED HANDS, JOINED ARCHIVES

Sisters of the Holy
Family in San Jose,
California, circa 1941.
Courtesy of SHF.

COLLABORATING TO BUILD A FUTURE FOR CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS ARCHIVES

Nadia Nasr, Santa Clara University Library

“What do you do when the records of a shrinking community—a community that historically has provided services to every level of society—are in jeopardy?” asked Malachy McCarthy in the November/December 2018 issue of *Archival Outlook* (page 12). “Such is the case for the records of many religious communities that are coming to completion, closure, or merging with other religious communities,” McCarthy reported in his coverage of the *Envisioning the Future of Catholic Religious Archives* conference hosted by Boston College in July 2018.

Many congregations have already formed or are considering forming joint archives and heritage centers. These include the Jesuit Archives and Research Center in St. Louis, Missouri; the Mercy Heritage Center

in Belmont, North Carolina; the National Archives of the Marianist Province of the United States in San Antonio, Texas; and McCarthy’s Claretian Missionary Archives in Chicago, to name a few.

Most at risk, however, are outlier congregations like the Sisters of the Holy Family (SHF) in Fremont, California. SHF was founded in San Francisco in 1872 by Sister Delores Armer, with the support of Joseph Sadoc Alemany, San Francisco’s first

Archbishop, and Father John J. Prendergast, to advocate for poor and needy families in post-Gold Rush California. Over time they expanded their missions to include

Most at risk are outlier congregations that don’t have another province of their order, community with the same heritage, or institution they’ve founded with which to merge their collections.

the development and management of home and child care services; catechism instruction; and social services for the underprivileged, minority, and native communities in California, Nevada, and Hawai’i. Today, SHF is preparing for permanent closure and planning for the long-term care of its congregation members. Where its well-organized and comprehensively described archives are

concerned, SHF does not have another province of its own order, a community with the same heritage, or an institution such as a hospital or school that it has founded with which to merge its institutional archives.

Increasing Women-centric Collections

Since early 2016, Santa Clara University's Archives and Special Collections (A&SC) has been reaching out to women religious congregations in the Bay Area. Our goal has been to explore collaborative opportunities to preserve and increase the visibility of congregational archives in the West. This is part of a larger initiative and new collecting focus centered on documenting the vital contributions that women have made to the Catholic Church. We also seek to balance our male-centric archival collections: Jesuits have long taught at and administered Santa Clara University since its founding in 1851; women didn't officially matriculate as students until 1961; and although women religious serve on our faculty, their work is largely absent from our archival records.

We took our first steps toward balancing our collections when we received the professional papers of Sandra M.



Sisters read to children at the SHF day home. *Courtesy of SHF.*

Schneiders, I.H.M., S.T.D., in 2015 (her motherhouse, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe, Michigan, maintains the materials pertaining to Schneiders' early life and formation). Encouraged by this donation from a notable theologian and woman religious, and conscious of declining

vocations or membership within religious communities, we began conversations with women religious congregations in the Bay Area. In late 2017, after hearing about A&SC's new collecting focus, SHF proposed donating its congregational archives. In

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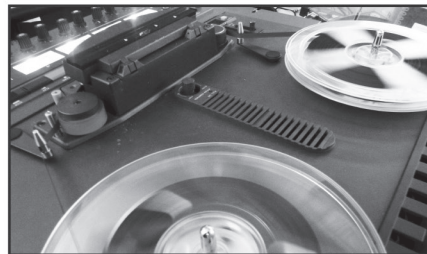
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early 2018, A&SC formally accepted and is on track to complete the transfer of the collections and open them for research this fall.

Faith and Funding

How are we turning this around so quickly, with only six full-time staff who also juggle an active instruction program, a modestly increasing number of individual researchers, the documentation of an already high volume of accessions, and numerous other ongoing priorities?

Faith and funding. A little bit of our own funding but mostly by means of generous funding that SHF has given to A&SC, a compelling show of faith in A&SC's archival programs and commitment to preserving and making accessible women religious communities' endangered collections.

As part of our agreement with SHF, we are already using a portion of these funds to cover the costs of planning and implementing the transfer of the collections from Fremont to Santa Clara by circuitous detour to Maryland. In January of 2019, History Associates, Inc. shipped the SHF collections to a facility in Rockville, Maryland, where they are working on the enhanced arrangement, description, and rehousing of the collections. We anticipate the final transfer of the collections and corresponding descriptive records to A&SC this summer, in time to open the collections for research in the fall. For longer term care of the collections we have put another portion of the funds into an endowment to support future SHF collection transfers, maintenance, and exhibition of the materials.

Using Other Initiatives as Models

Beyond the care of its own collections, SHF has also endowed critical seed funding to support future programming for women religious congregations, particularly in support of archives. It was meaningful to the SHF congregation not only to have secured a home for their collections but also to have contributed to a larger initiative supporting women religious archives.



The St. Elizabeth Day Home. Courtesy of SHF.

Library and archival initiatives from recent decades may serve as models to chart a path forward. In the early 2000s, many libraries and archives formed statewide, collaborative digitization programs. These leveraged the power of partnerships, providing access to high-cost digital collections software and digitization services to institutions with fewer resources. More recently in 2009, the American Society for Theatre Research launched its American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP) to provide archival consulting and financial support to assist local theater companies across the United States with preserving and making accessible records of theatrical process and product. Many state or regional consortia have established centralized finding aid and digital collections databases to promote discovery of collections. Others, like those in the OhioLink consortium, have used interlibrary loan networks to

transport special collections for short-term use by researchers in a partnering special collections unit. While there are numerous examples of strategically efficient collaborative models, each needs short- and long-term funding for initial and continued success.

Dreaming Big

While we don't know yet exactly what our future collaborations will look like, we envision many things. We envision formally establishing a research center with increased staffing to administer collections while also offering consultation help to congregational archivists. We envision providing grant funding for archival supplies or implementation of plans developed during consulting activities. We envision providing digitization services and hosting digital collections and finding aids, and sharing them with data aggregators. We envision establishing an interlibrary loan network for researchers to use local congregational archives collections in our reading room, and then returning the collections to their home archives.

What we envision is ambitious. We are laying groundwork for the future. In the last year we have expanded our archival collections to include the archives of a New England-based canonical hermitess whose hermitage was funded by the California Province of Jesuits, and the periodicals of the Catholic Women's Network, a Bay Area organization founded by a graduate of SCU's graduate program in pastoral ministries. Altogether these collections, coupled with those of Schneiders and SHF, constitute many facets of women in theology in the Catholic Church. These collections are a legacy that we treasure.

We eagerly await circulation of the white paper cited by McCarthy as one of the outcomes of the *Envisioning the Future of Catholic Religious Archives* conference. In the meantime, as we continue our conversations with women religious congregations there is one thing we are clear on: collaboration will be key as we work together to build a future for Catholic Religious Archives in the West. ■